

Social Thinking

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Project Description

The goal of the education sector is to prepare students for life. Executive functioning plays an essential role in student success in school and in life afterwards.¹ The goal of our PDIG was to create practical and useful materials for Social Thinking, a skill we noticed many of our secondary students are lacking. Our focus was to create lessons and activities that provide opportunities to support learning and practicing social skills. According to Michelle Garcia Winner, students can only “truly become more socially competent if they understand **how** the social world works, and **why** specific social skills are important in different contexts.”²

During the project planning session, we decided our focus should be about creating a Learning Evaluation Situation that is complementary to the English Language Arts curriculum.³ Our methodology for lesson planning is backwards-design and we focused on learning outcomes and concepts for summative assessments. With the outcomes in mind we created a plan to scaffold understanding. We focused on developing digital materials with G Suite that could be copied and adapted by teachers to fit the needs of their students. We reviewed Michelle Garcia Winner’s work and took sample chapters to share as her available materials are extensive and provide a comprehensive program for teachers to follow. Our goal was to create materials that could be accessible to any age or ability of student.

Project Goals

Research repeatedly tells the education world that the relationship between student and teacher plays an essential role towards academic success.⁴ We want our students to be problem-solvers and self-advocates when they leave us at the end of their high school career. Michelle Garcia Winner has created a detailed [Social Skills](#)

¹ "Executive function is the key to success in school - Active For Life." 27 Jun. 2018, <https://activeforlife.com/executive-function-is-the-key-to-success-in-school/>. Accessed 15 Apr. 2019.

² Winner, M. G. (2008). *Think social!: A social thinking curriculum for school-age students*. Santa Clara, CA: Think Social Publishing, page 1

³ "Progression of Learning - English Language Arts - Secondary." 20 Aug. 2010, http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/site_web/documents/education/jeunes/pfeq/PDA_PFEQ_engli sh-language-arts-secondaire_2010_EN.pdf. Accessed 15 Apr. 2019.

⁴ "Teacher Student Relationships - Australian Society for Evidence" <http://www.evidencebasedteaching.org.au/crash-course-evidence-based-teaching/teacher-student-relatio nships/>. Accessed 15 Apr. 2019.

[program called Social Thinking](#). The premise of the program is that students, especially those on the higher-end of the spectrum disorder, need to be explicitly taught social skills. We had originally wanted to connect to both ELA and ERC, however, looking at QEP we determined that it would be easier to focus on adapting introductory concepts from Social Thinking into an ELA unit. Our goal was to create something useful for our needs, but also for the needs of other teachers who may be experiencing similar challenges in their classrooms.

As Michelle Garcia Winner states, our project is not to make a student seem more “normal.” Winner writes “the reality is that teaching social thinking and related skills to a student who does not intuitively develop them is one of the hardest things we could possibly teach a person.”⁵

Project Outcomes

During the development of these materials, we practiced different ideas with students and we’ve included [samples of student work](#) in the [Google Drive Folder](#). The materials are accessible through [G Suite](#). The Social Thinking materials convinced us of the need to develop social skills using the Social Thinking paradigm. Social thinking is

“our meaning maker... We observe and listen [in order] to interpret the perspectives of others... Our social thinking and social skills directly impact how others feel about us. This impacts how we are treated, how we feel about others, and ultimately - how we feel about ourselves!... Improving a person’s social thinking begins with improving self-awareness. Only as individuals gain awareness of their own thoughts, emotions, and intentions can they become increasingly aware of the thoughts, emotions, intentions, and actions of others.”⁶

Reinvestment

Completing this project was an eye-opening experience. Each learning objective and lesson created reminded us of situations during which one of our students would have benefited from proactive support prior to conflicts, embarrassing moments or misunderstandings. We developed a greater appreciation of the Social Thinking materials by Michelle G. Winner and hope the materials we’ve developed can be a “jumping off point” for our colleagues to embrace the Social Thinking curriculum.

⁵ Winner, M. G. *Think social!: A social thinking curriculum for school-age students*. Santa Clara, CA: Think Social Publishing, 2008. p. 16

⁶ "Socialthinking - Social Thinking's Mission." <https://www.socialthinking.com/LandingPages/Mission>. Accessed 15 Apr. 2019.

We attempted to follow a Universal Design for Learning model, in that we provided students a variety of modes of expression. Many of our lessons, for example, provide struggling students the opportunity to draw, discuss and act out their ideas instead of writing. We also provided a variety of modes of representation through discussions, games, activities, video clips, comics and text.⁷

It is imperative to remember that these social skills are not expected to be “memorized” within the certain period of time. Some students may spend their whole adult life continuing to learn and practice these skills. In the classroom, individual students, or groups of students, will need to be taught these lessons over and over, while other groups of students will move through them more quickly. We have used many social scenarios that have appeared in the past years from recess or classroom situations as examples with our students when we have had to reiterate a certain skill set.

Lesson Plan Details:

https://drive.google.com/open?id=1Xkx89Yg5gQunKE2KxVwPwSEKJVQ578_wEqaewtNvm6k

Google Folder where the materials are available:

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1fhYUZL1-O2GGSp7g3f31gmOgaNeKtueA>

Final Report

The included Social Thinking materials provide key vocabulary to use with students. The program provides realistic self-regulation techniques for students to metacognitively use. The graphic novel, *Social Fate or Fortune* is a perfect example of how social stories prepare students or how to have students reflect on different situations. The Social Thinking program is extensive and comprehensive, but it is difficult to find the time within the curriculum mandates from the Ministry of Quebec Education. Within the Social Thinking materials, there are excellent suggested Individualized Education Plan goals that are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time Sensitive).

The materials utilized during our PDIG Project are a small portion of the Social Thinking materials. They are an opportunity for teachers to consider the possible use and adaptation of the Social Thinking materials into their classrooms and we hope that teachers will use and adapt our materials to help students develop their social skills. As a greater society we expect students to learn social skills through “osmosis” or imitation of others.

⁷ "The UDL Guidelines - CAST.org." <http://udlguidelines.cast.org/>. Accessed 15 Apr. 2019.

With the increase of technology obsession⁸, individualism and peer-attachment children experience less and less opportunities to interact with alpha-adults that provide appropriate role models to transfer social skills and norms. The book, *Hold On To Your Kids: Why Parents Need To Matter More Than Peers*, (2019) by Gordon Neufeld provides a convincing explanation about the need for adults to support students by being their alpha compass and direct them to becoming independent and competent members of society. Social Thinking is an available tool for teachers and the education system to support children to become functioning adults in our society. The materials we've created provide an introductory guide for teachers to the Social Thinking program.

⁸ "There Is a New Link Between Screen-Time and Autism | Psychology" 29 Jun. 2017, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/the-fallible-mind/201706/there-is-new-link-between-screen-time-and-autism>. Accessed 15 Apr. 2019.